SONG OF THE LONG MARCH

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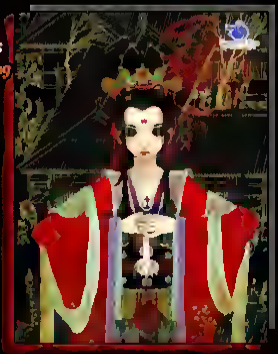

Song of the Long March 49

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< CHAPTER 49 > PART-1

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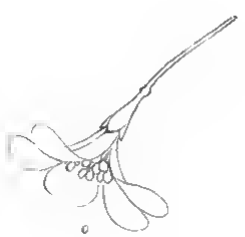

BIG BROTHER?
BIG...
MMM
.....
.....

UYGHUR
I'VE STARTED AN INVESTI-GATION,
BUT I HAVEN'T FOUND ANYTHING THUS FAR.
NO ONE HERE DARES TO ASK WHY THE ELTEBER WAS ANGRY.
PERHAPS YOU CAN ASK AROUND AT THE OLD LADY'S PLACE?
HOWEVER, I DO NOT ADVISE CONTINUING TO PURSUE THIS MATTER.
THOUGH IT IS SUSPICIOUS,
IT IS NOT WORTH THE RISK OF INCURRING ELTEBER'S IRE.

.....

THE REASON YOUR BIG SISTER IS LEAVING IS SO YOU CAN STAY

BUT I DO KNOW SOMEONE FROM UYGHUR WITH A MOLE UNDER HER LEFT EYE.
OH?
YOUNG MASTER,
PLEASE TELL ME EVERY-THING.
MY MOTHER.

BIG SISTER
BIG SISTER
TAKE ME WITH YOU.
...NOT THIS TIME, OKAY?

COME.
ELTEBER?
GET ME ONE OF OLD LADY'S MAIDS - THE ONE CALLED LI DIYA.
NOW?

YES,
NOW.
YES,
I ONLY KNOW MY SECOND UNCLE RESCUED HER FROM THE TURKISH ARMY. I DON'T EVEN KNOW THE NAME OF HER TRIBE.
IN OTHER WORDS
OTHER THAN THE FACT YOUR MOTHER WAS AN UYGHUR, YOU KNOW NOTHING ELSE ABOUT HER?
.....
THE OLD LADY'S ELDEST DAUGHTER DIED ON THE BATTLEFIELD
COULD IT BE...

CONSIDER THIS FOR A SECOND, WHAT IF ELTEBER'S RAGE WAS CAUSED BY—
HIM THINKING WE WERE TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OLD LADY'S SYMPATHY USING HIS DEAD SISTER'S MOLE?
IF TRUE, I'LL HAVE TO CONGRATULATE YOUNG MASTER IN ADVANCE ON FINDING YOUR OWN TRIBE.
I COULD TELL FROM THE WAY HE LOOKED AT ME.
HE ALREADY SEES US AS CHARLATANS
...I KNOW.
HOWEVER, WE MUST NOT BE TOO HASTY TRYING TO SEEK PROOF.

PRECISELY, THUS I URGE FOR PATIENCE ON THE YOUNG MASTER'S PART.
THE TANGLED WEB OF FOREIGN POLITICS IS, IN THE END, BUT A REPRESENTATION OF DIFFERENT DESIRES AND CIRCUMSTANCES, I DON'T BELIEVE I NEED TO EXPLAIN ITS UNPREDICTABILITY ANY FUTHER
IF THIS IS INDEED MASTER'S OWN TRIBE...
OUR GOAL TO BRING PROSPERITY TO TANG...
DOES IT CHANGE?

CHILD!
I'M NOT LEAVING!
I WISH TO KNOW AS WELL!
NO.

LET HIM STAY.
.....
ASHINA SUN.
WHAT DO THEY CALL YOU IN THE KHAGANATE?

TEGIN SUN WHY HAVE YOU COME?
THE TEGIN OF THE ASHINA CLAN...
DAD, DON'T YOU THINK THAT BROTHER SUN HAS AN UNCANNY RESEMBLENCE TO UNCLE?
RIGHT?
I'M HERE TO FIND OUT SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST.
AO DAN HAS SHOWN ME A GREAT DEAL OF KINDNESS
WHY WOULD TEGIN STIR UP TROUBLES FOR THE BOTH OF US?
THE PAST HAS ALREADY PASSED

DAD. .
YOU'RE NOT SURPRISED?
I'M NOT LEAVING UNTIL I GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS.

...NINETEEN YEARS AGO, AO DAN BROUGHT MY BROTHER'S ONLY SON TO THE KHAGANATE...
THE TURKS PROBABLY UNDERESTIMATED THE STRENGTH OF OUR KHITAN'S FIRST WARRIOR...
AT THE TURKIC ENCAMPMENT, IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A ONE-SIDED BLOODBATH,
BUT HE MANAGED TO FIGHT HIS WAY OUT, LEAVING A TRAIL OF BLOOD BEHIND.

"LET SHE'ER GO AND I WILL LET THE TWO OF YOU LIVE."
"BUT YOU HAVE TO HIDE INSIDE MY TENT AND MENTION THIS TO NO ONE."
JIELI KHAN WHO WAS STILL A TEGIN AT THE TIME, STEPPED FORWARD AND TOLD HIM,
NOWHERE TO RUN,
HE BARGED INTO KHATUN'S TENT AND TOOK THE YOUNG KHAN HOSTAGE
AND OF COURSE AO DAN WHO CARRIED THE TASK OF PROTECTING OUR LEADER'S SON, AGREED TO HIS TERMS
BY THE TIME THE NEWS OF MY BROTHER'S DEATH REACHED HIM, A YEAR HAD ALREADY PASSED
.....

THEN,
HOW DID YOU FIND OUT?
.....
THE ONES WHO ACCOMPANIED HIM WERE ALL KILLED...
BUT, SOMEHOW, AODAN MANAGED TO BRIBE A TURK,
HE CAME HERE AND TOLD ME EVERYTHING.
AND I HAD HIM KILLED

I SENT HIS HEAD ALONG WITH AO DAN'S WIFE AND SON TO THE KHAGANATE,
AND CHASTISED AO DAN FOR ATTEMPTING TO STIR UNREST WITH HIS LIES. I BANISHED HIM FROM THE DA HE CLAN, NEVER TO RETURN.
DAD?
HOW COULD YOU...
SWACK

LISTEN CAREFULLY,
IF YOU REALLY WISH TO BECOME A LEADER ONE DAY...
LISTEN TO YOUR FATHER,
HE IS RIGHT.

THE THINGS YOU HOLD DEAR,
I WILL ALSO PROTECT THEM WITH MY LIFE.

AND I'LL TAKE THE TURKIC ENVOY WITH ME.

I WILL LEAVE FOR THE KHAGA-NATE AT DAY-BREAK.

BIG BROTHER!

I DIDN'T USE TO THINK..
THAT THERE WERE MANY THINGS I CARED ABOUT IN THIS WORLD..
...
BROTHER,
THANK YOU.

DUO LUO, QUICK, COME TAKE A LOOK,
THAT LAD BARGED INTO YOUR SISTER'S TENT AGAIN
SHOULD WE STOP...
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE TWO OF YOU?

LET HIM BE.
LET HIM DO WHATEVER HE WANTS BEFORE DAYBREAK
EH?
AN INVITATION FROM THE ELTEBER?

I KNOW IT'S EARLY IN THE MORNING
I'M SORRY FOR HAVING TO INTERRUPT ELDER'S REST.
IT'S FINE, DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
BUT ISN'T THE OLD LADY IN CHARGE OF ALL THE MERCANTILE MATTERS?
THIS TIME, THE ELTEBER SEEMS TO BE ESPECIALLY INTERESTED.
HE EVEN SUMMONED ME FOR QUESTIONING LAST NIGHT.
AND TOLD ME TO INVITE THE ELDER OVER EARLY IN THE MORNING...
OH.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR HARD WORK.
I WILL HEAD OVER IMMEDIATELY.

I'M LEAVING,
MOTHER.

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